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MEMORANDUM

IN CASE OF

CAPT. JAMES E. JOUETT.

1880

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NAVY DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON, *March* 2, 1880.

SIR: Agreeably to your request I have the honor to transmit herewith a memorandum of the gallant services of Captain James E. Jouett, on account of which he was nominated for advancement to the grade of Commodore.

Very respectfully,

R. W. THOMPSON,
Secretary of the Navy.

Hon. JNO. S. WILLIAMS,
U. S. Senate.

MEMORANDUM

IN CASE OF CAPTAIN JAMES E. JOUETT.

Captain James E. Jouett, then a lieutenant in the Navy, was eminent and conspicuous in battle on the night of Nov. 7, 1861, the occasion being the capture and destruction of the armed privateer schooner "Royal Yacht," off Galveston, Texas.

Flag officer W. W. McKean, commanding the Gulf Blockading Squadron, reported to the Secretary of the Navy, December 3, 1861, that he had just received intelligence of a "most gallant exploit," and enclosed a report from Captain Henry Eagle, commanding the United States Frigate "Santee," which, with other reports accompanying it, gave the full particulars of the affair.

Lieutenant Jouett having volunteered for the service, was placed in command of a boat expedition, comprising 1st and 2d launches of the "Santee;" the main object of the expedition being to pass, under cover of darkness, Bolivar and Point forts, enter Galveston Bay, and surprise and burn the war steamer "General Rusk," lying under Pelican Island Fort. The boats succeeded in passing the privateer "Royal Yacht," also the outer forts, but in endeavoring to avoid the sentinels on Pelican Fort, grounded on Bolivar Spit and were discovered. Although the first object of this expedition was thus defeated, Lieutenant Jouett fully executed the other, and not less heroic part of it, which was to capture and destroy the privateer "Royal Yacht." She was boarded, and after a severe encounter on her decks, was captured and burned, it being impossible in her condition to take her to the "Santee."

Captain Eagle, in communicating the result of this to the Department, says it was with pleasure that he reported to the Secretary of the Navy the gallantry of Lieutenant Jouett.

Although severely wounded in the arm and chest at the commencement of the contest, and suffering from his wounds, and the loss of blood, he exhibited great firmness throughout; and, after setting fire to the schooner, was three hours in the launch, having the care of twelve prisoners and six of his wounded men. It was with confidence that he "recommended him for the command of a vessel suitable to his rank."

Lieut. Jouett was pierced through the arm with a pike, which also entered his side. The contest was a very severe and gallant one. The pilot of the expedition was killed, and two other men died of wounds received.

Flag Officer McKean issued a general order, which was read on the deck of each vessel of his squadron, expressing his appreciation of the gallantry displayed by the officers and men of the expedition, assuring them that he fully shared in the satisfaction they must feel at the "brilliant success which crowned their efforts;" and, while expressing his conviction that their names would be enrolled by a grateful country among those who in former years had shed so bright a lustre on the American Navy, he was confident the survivors would unite with him in thanksgiving to the protecting Providence manifested to them while engaged in so "hazardous an enterprise."

Secretary Welles, in a communication to Flag Officer McKean, acknowledging the receipt of the reports of the capture and destruction of the "Royal Yacht," says:

"The Department cannot, in too high terms, express its "admiration of the daring and successful exploit of Lieu-"tenant Jouett and the officers and men under him. The "capture of a schooner, well armed and manned, and with

" every advantage of resistance, after a desperate encounter, " speaks well of the intrepidity and bravery of the captors."

He at the same time transmitted an order for Lieutenant Jouett to proceed to New York, as it was the purpose of the Department to "give him a command worthy of his gallantry."

Lieutenant Jouett subsequently commanded the "Montgomery" and "R. R. Cuyler," and was actively engaged in blockade duty. His next command was the side-wheel wooden steamer "Metacomet," which participated in the fight in Mobile Bay, and was lashed to the side of Rear Admiral Farragut's flagship, the "Hartford," and passed the forts with her.

It was in this fight, August 5, 1864, that Captain, (then Lieutenant Commander,) Jouett was again eminent and conspicuous in battle. Rear Admiral Farragut says in his report:

" Finding myself raked by the rebel gunboats, I ordered " the 'Metacomet' to cast off and go in pursuit of them, " one of which, the 'Selma' she succeeding in capturing.

" Captain Jouett was after her in a moment, and in an " hour's time he had her as his prize. * * * Lieutenant " Commander Jouett's conduct during the whole affair " commands my warmest commendation. The 'Morgan' " and 'Gaines' succeeded in escaping under the protection " of the guns of Fort Morgan, which would have been pre- " vented had the other gunboats been as prompt in their " movements as the 'Metacomet.'"

Again he reports:

" Our little consort, the 'Metacomet' was under my im- " mediate eye during the whole of the action up to the " moment I ordered her to cast off in pursuit of the 'Selma.' " The coolness and promptness of Lieutenant Commander " Jouett, throughout, merit high praise; his whole conduct " was worthy of his reputation."

The "Metacomet" cast off from the "Hartford" at about 8 a. m., and steamed for the "Selma," "Gaines," and "Morgan," all of which were annoying the fleet by a raking fire. They engaged the "Metacomet" with their stern guns, of which each had three, while retreating. At half-past eight the "Gaines" sought the cover of the fort in a crippled condition; at nine the "Morgan" hauled off, and ten minutes later the "Selma" struck her flag to the "Metacomet." The "Selma" had a crew of about 90 officers and men and was well defended. Her commanding officer was fatally wounded and died shortly after; her first lieutenant was killed, and a number of others killed or wounded.

The above is a brief statement from the official records of the gallantry of Captain Jouett on the two occasions mentioned. The estimation in which his exploits are held by prominent and creditable writers, and by some of the leading officers of the Navy, is shown in his printed memorial, herewith, which also contains detailed accounts of the capture of the "Royal Yacht."

For these eminent, conspicuous, and signal acts of gallantry Captain Jouett has never received appropriate and special recognition—has never received that reward, by advancement in rank, which his marked and prominently gallant conduct merited.

A Board of Admirals was appointed in 1865 to consider and report on the claims of officers for advancement for heroic conduct. The report of this Board has disappeared from the files of the Department, and it is not positively known what their recommendations were. Admiral D. D. Porter, who was a member of it, writes to the Department that "the Board recommended Commander Jouett should receive an advancement of 30 numbers for 'heroic conduct in battle.' There were many advanced who were not recommended by that Board, while such officers as Jouett were left untouched. His record is one of the best in the Navy, and his acts of gallantry cannot be questioned."

That the Board did make such a recommendation is confirmed by other persons, even were the positive statements of so distinguished an officer, who was a member of it, not sufficient.

The nomination is to make Captain Jouett a commodore, and place him at the foot of the list of officers of that grade. He is now number 17 on the list of captains. The nomination is made in accordance with sections 1506 and 1507 of the Revised Statutes, viz:

"SEC. 1506. Any officer of the Navy may, by and with "the advice and consent of the Senate, be advanced not "exceeding thirty numbers in rank, for eminent and con- "spicuous conduct in battle or extraordinary heroism; and "the rank of officers shall not be changed except in accord- "ance with the provisions of existing law, and by and with "the advice and consent of the Senate."

"SEC. 1507. Any officer who is nominated to a higher "grade by the provisions of the preceding section, shall be "promoted, notwithstanding the number of said grade may "be full; but no further promotions shall take place in "that grade, except for like cause, until the number is re- "duced to that provided by law."

Lapse of time should not be a bar to the recognition of gallant service, nor does the statute make it so.

Authority exists to advance officers, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, not exceeding thirty numbers in rank, for eminent and conspicuous conduct in battle, or extraordinary heroism.

The law has confided to the President the power to nominate for advancement, whenever in his judgment the record of an officer is such as to deserve it, and, if the Senate consent, passed omissions can be thus supplied and long deferred, but well merited justice awarded.

To give the statute a temporary application might deprive those of its benefits, who deserve them by admitted acts of

heroism, although they may have well established their claims to such distinction.

Reward for meritorious service bestowed after long and mature deliberation is often quite as fair, and as well deserved as that meted out under the excitement of the moment.

The record of Captain Jouett is without blemish.

Other officers have been advanced by special nomination of the President and confirmation of the Senate, whose acts were not more heroic than Captain Jouett's, and he now stands no higher in rank than others of his date who have, as he has, reached their positions by general legislation. His relative position is the same as it was in the early years of his service.

R. W. THOMPSON,
Secretary of the Navy.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
March 2, 1880.

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